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CALL, K.





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BOSTON UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

T H E S I S

Honoré de Balzac; his life and his works

Submitted by

Katharine Call (A. B., Boston University 1912)

In partial fulfillment of requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts 1920

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Balzac, Honoré de, 1799-1850

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Honoré de Balzac: his life and his works

Submitted by

Mathias Gail (A. B., Boston University 1912)

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## ANALYSIS

The thesis deals with the life and works of Honore de Balzac; the influences which were brought to bear upon him and were instrumental in shaping his genius, and the results of these influences as shown in his novels.

First, we shall consider his family inheritance, especially in respect to his genius; then his youth, education and numerous struggles to gain a footing in the world; his time of apprenticeship with Monsieur Guillonnet-Merville and Monsieur Passy we shall consider in respect to their influence upon his later career.

The reader will see under what great handicaps the founder of the realist novel labored; what opposition he met with in his family, friends and society at large; his financial difficulties and how he dealt with them.

His refusal to pursue the practice of law was his first step in the right direction, the starting-point of his career. The failure of "Cromwell" was important in that he turned his attention from the stage to the novel and was the turning point in his career.

We shall then see how fast he advances in his profession after the meeting with Monsieur Levavasseur, for with the publication of "Les Chouans" and "La Physiologie du Mariage" Balzac becomes famous over night.

How greatly this success influences him to start in at the printing business we shall plainly see, for his head is turned with conceit and he plunges headlong in the printing



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of the classics which will result in financial disaster for Balzac, and only adds to his cares.

His repeated business failures drive him headlong in his literary efforts and results in Balzac's ceaseless working like a slave to relieve himself from his debts.

With his rise to fame in the literary world, Balzac rises correspondingly in the social world, and we shall see that his mode of living will change conspicuously, due to Balzac's conception of genius and its position in the world, and to a slight relief from the pressure of overwhelming debts.

Balzac mingles with all classes and types of human beings and has associations with the brightest financial, literary and political stars of his day whom he met in the salons of the leaders in the social world where he makes the acquaintance of many cultivated women, some of whom are to influence his life in no small measure.

It will be clear that at the height of his literary success, his health begins to fail. We hear him cry: "Halte-là! Madame la Mort!" early in his career.

Then his eternal restlessness and cravings for wealth impel him to travel, especially in Sardinia and Corsica. Financially speaking, he comes back poor in money, but rich in ideas. Next, the irresistible money-mania will force him into politics, where as in the case of the printing business, he meets with failure; then, he begins to write again for the theater, but the attempt ends in failure.

We shall see that, from the time of his first literary successes, Balzac will appear happier in his work, but he will always be dissatisfied until he meets his "Pauline"



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in the person of Madame Hanska. She is to be his guide during the best years of his life and work.

In the midst of his labors, when his work is half completed, and his two great desires-- "to be famous and to be loved" are fulfilled, he must drop his pen and prepare for the life which is to come and into which he entered in 1850.

A résumé of some of his best works gives an idea of Balzac's great genius, his originality, simplicity and deep understanding of human nature.

As the characters of his novels are Balzac's own creations, children of his bloody toil, they must of necessity partake of his own nature and we shall see his nature in his works. Through his life we understand his creations and from his creations we understand his life.

Balzac is César Birotteau with his horror of bankruptcy; he is Félix Grandet with his passion for money; he is Balthazar Claes in search of the "Absolute" and Pons, the connoisseur of paintings.

Vigorous with Balzac's mighty breath, his beings live and in them Balzac himself lives a thousand lives in different guises.

We shall see that Balzac stands by himself in his particular field of literary endeavor. His work is unique in its originality and broad human interest. He is rightly named "the new Molière" for he has fixed the form for the novel, just as Molière did for the Comédie.

His influence in France during the XIXth century as well as in other parts of the world will be seen clearly in the fields of drama, the novel, and history.

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## HONORÉ de BALZAC

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Honoré de Balzac was born at Tours on St. Honoré's Day, May 16, 1799. He was the eldest of four children; two girls and two boys. His father, Bernard Balzac, was born in Languedoc in 1746. His daughter, Laure, (Mme. Surville) says that he was an advocate of the Council under Louis XVI. However, documentary evidence tends to show that he was an officer of the Commune. It is certain that he had powerful political friends who aided him to escape from the vengeance of his enemies, when they sent him up into the North upon matters relating to the provisioning of the army. In 1797, Bernard Balzac married the daughter of his chief in the government hospital service.

Mme. Surville says he had one dominating idea, that of preserving his great vigor and robust health, which, he figured, would sometime bring him wealth, if he should live to the great age of one hundred years, as he fully expected he should. It seems that at the age of forty-five years, Honoré de Balzac's father, thinking that he would never marry, had invested his savings in La Farge's Bank, La Tontine, as it was called. As we have said, he fully expected to round out his hundred years at least and thus to outlive the other shareholders, so that he would finally come into the possession of millions. This monomania haunted him continually and passed on in the inheritance of his illustrious son.



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He was a man of great vigor and robust health (Balzac, in "Le Père Goriot", describes Vantrin as endowed "d'une santé de taureau", a phrase which he later applied to himself and one which may be well applied to his father.) It is said that once, when a young man, Balzac's father was invited to carve a partridge at the table of his patron. With one blow, he cut through the partridge, split the platter, and buried the knife in the table.

Mme. Surville described her father as very original; of great memory, (it is said that, meeting a fellow-citizen of Languedoc after he had been away fourteen years, Bernard Balzac was able to converse with him fluently in his native dialect without having read or heard this particular patois during the aforesaid years); a keen observer; somewhat of a scoffer, although of a kindly disposition and of unusual breadth of mind. He was endowed with a remarkable gift of repartee.

Mme. Surville says that her mother, a Parisian by birth, was rich, beautiful, much younger than her father; of a rare vivacity of mind and imagination; of unwearying activity; of great firmness of decision; and of a boundless devotion to her family.

Balzac says of her imagination: "Poor mother! that same imagination which she bestowed upon me drives her mind from north to south perpetually. Such tossings to and fro are fatiguing; I know it well myself."

Harsher critics than her daughter say of Mme. Balzac that this "great firmness of decision" was an obstinate domination which she displayed in matters relating to her family, and that, as years passed by, she grew more and more nervous, fretful



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From his remarkable parents, de Balzac inherited, among other noteworthy qualities his great energy, kind-heartedness, keen imagination and great powers of observation and memory. From this union of Languedoc and Paris came the world's master-novelist of pure French extraction.

According to the custom of those times, Balzac, soon after his birth was sent to the country where he remained for about four years, and, in 1804, he was taken to visit his grandparents in Paris. His sister, Laure, says that the visit made a great impression upon him and he chattered continually of what he did and saw. He was especially interested in his grandfather who died shortly after the visit. It is said, that, for sometime after the grandfather's death, if his sister, Laure, grew noisy or boisterous at play, Honore would cry out in a stern, pained voice: "Laure, think on your grandfather."

Even at that tender age, he was noticeably sensitive and impressionable, already showing evidence of a great memory. His sister says that he was always happy and jovial, but was like a barometer under changing weather-conditions.

At the age of seven years, he was taken from the day-school at Tours and sent to the celebrated Seminary at Vendôme which had been founded by the Monastic order of the Oratorians.

There he had to remain for seven years without once seeing the family-dwelling, although twice a year, at Easter and on prize-days, the family came to visit him, but it was very seldom indeed that they had the pleasure of seeing him crowned.

The life at Vendôme was hard; little recreation; no visits home; discipline severe; obligatory letters due the family



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at stated intervals; confessions; harsh punishments; prison for the worst offenders, and Balzac was often of the number who passed day after day in the narrow, wooden cage. There his only occupation was to work over in his mind the matter he had accumulated in his voracious readings and give free rein to his imagination, for, since he was being punished, he was deprived of his great solace and comfort, his reading hours. In the cold weather he suffered excessively from chilblains, but, during this uncomfortable period, he was sure of a respite from the use of the ferule.

However, his life at the Seminary was not all hardships, for there was the rich, old library belonging to the order, filled with the accumulations of centuries, to which he had great access. Then too, every pupil had his own plot of ground to cultivate and his own pigeons, and, in the Seminary, theatrical performances were given. There was much to enjoy.

His school-life he described in "Louis Lambert", and, upon maturer reflection, looking back over those years, Balzac seemed to consider himself a precocious child of great promise, a prodigy of intellectual wealth. Especially did he mourn the destruction of his "Treatise on the Will" which he wrote when he should have been attending to other duties and for which disobedience he was duly punished.

However, the records of the Seminary contain no evidence of unusual ability in the case of Balzac. According to reports, he was careless, indifferent, and taciturn, well-meaning and very original. "A poor scholar and a dull boy" was the recommendation he received from his professors, just such a recommendation as his master Goldsmith received in school.



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The most striking thing about the ability of Balzac was that, while he was in the Seminary, he had already made a name for himself among the lower classes as a writer, but his reputation as such was hotly contested by the upper-classmen who were wont to taunt him with the first line of a poem which he wrote on the Incas: "O, Inca, o roi infortuné et malheureux!"

Every spare moment the young reader could find he spent in the library, delving deep into books on all subjects; novels, dramas, chemistry, alchemy, history and mysticism (a taste which he probably inherited from his mother who later eagerly pursued with him the study of somnambulism and mysticism) until he fell ill. He could not talk, nor did he apparently notice what was going on about him, so that, finally, so alarming did his condition become that his parents were obliged to take him home. Balzac said afterwards that he was suffering from a "congestion of ideas", acquired from his unrestrained, unbridled reading, a passion due to the influence of an impelling, driving dynamic force, perhaps the root of his genius which led him to store away in his vast brain great quantities of material without knowing how or for what purpose.

At any rate, in 1813 he was returned to his father's home where, after weeks of rest-cure in the open air of Touraine, in the companionship of his sister, Laure, he was restored to normal health and resumed his studies at the College of Tours and with tutors at his father's home.

Even at this time he was saying that he would fill the world with his name. Of course, everybody but his adoring sister, Laure, laughed at his wild fancies, as they called them, and no one believed him. One old friend of the family (whom



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Balzac was that, while he was in the Seminary, he had already made a name for himself among the lower classes as a writer, but his reputation as such was wholly contested by the upper-classesmen who were wont to laugh at him with the first line of a poem which he wrote on the lines: "O, I see, a not infrequent et malheureux!"

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Balzac despised ever after) suggested, that, as he wrote a "fine hand", it would be well to put him into some office.

In 1814, his father was summoned to Paris, where Balzac finished his studies with M. Lepître, rue de St. Louis, and M<sup>rs</sup>. Beuzelin and Sganzer, rue de Thorigny in Le Marais where the Balzac family then lived. Balzac attended lectures at La Sorbonne and, in 1816, his studies ended, he returned to his home "the personification of happiness" said Mme. Surville.

Already his passion for collecting was asserting itself and he was getting together a fine library which he intended to bequeath to his native city of Tours which he dubbed "the least literary of cities". However, his pride and sensitive nature were so deeply wounded by lack of attention from his fellow-townsmen, whenever he returned to Tours, that he gave up the idea.

In 1816, he entered the law-office of M. Guillonnet-Merville, where he remained eighteen months. Then he entered the law-office of M. Passy, a notary. As yet, he was in no way remarkable; his sister alone was a hero-worshipper and she believed implicitly in his genius.

In these offices, as he pursued his law-studies, he learned a great deal about legal lore, of which he made use in "César Birotteau" and other works, and he gathered much knowledge of human nature. His sister solemnly assures us that a prominent Parisian barrister said he always kept a copy of "César Birotteau" on his desk, because it contained such a fine treatment of the subject of bankruptcy.

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His family tried every means to dissuade him from pursuing literature and finally, seeing that resistance was useless, they gave in to him. His father said to him: Il faut être roi pour n'être pas goujat dans les lettres.

--Je serai roi--said Balzac.

No doubt, his father was much disappointed, for he had suffered some money-losses and had been retired from his government position because of his age. To the family Balzac's decision seemed sheer madness; especially, since, as yet, he had shown no remarkable talent for writing.

Judging from his "Peau de Chagrin", one may believe his father and he were not particularly congenial, which would not be unlikely, since his father had always been old to him. Of course, they didn't have the same interests, nor ideas. Seeing that opposition was useless, his father yielded to Balzac's wild whim.

So he granted his son two years in which to try out his literary powers and also allowed him an income of one hundred francs a month. Balzac's mother who was firmer and harder with her son than his father, probably fixed the sum at as low a figure as possible in order that the hardships which he would have to endure might bring him to his senses quickly.

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servant, referred to as Iris in his letters, to look after his wants, and then the rest of the family retired to Villeparisis, a small town about eighteen miles from Paris where Balzac withdrew to his attic-room, number nine, rue Lediguières<sup>s</sup>, chosen on account of its nearness to the Library de l'Arsenal<sup>A</sup>, apparently the only library unknown to him at that time and where he was very desirous of working. Balzac had to be rather careful about appearing too much in public at Paris, because, to save the family honor, he was supposed to be visiting cousins at Alby. (*alby*)

He worked in the library day after day and spent his nights seated at his table, dressed in a monkish robe, writing the mass of facts, which he had accumulated during the day.

For his nourishment he ate bread and sipped lemonade, sometimes drinking great quantities of coffee to keep himself awake. He had so many subjects upon which to write and so many ideas in his head that he wished to express, that he hardly knew where to begin. He wrote and rewrote in feverish excitement, racing against time, and yet he never succeeded in any of his works in attaining the smoothness he wished to give to his writings. Always at his side he had a copy of St. Beuve's *Volupté* which he studied constantly for its smoothness of style. "He is obscure sometimes because he strikes too many matches at once" says Henry James.

Time was passing fast and, as yet, he had made no name for himself in literature. He felt the driving pressure of the necessity of proving to the world that he could write. From his correspondence, Mme. Surville brings back to us his cry of anguish: "Laure! Laure!--my two immense desires and my only



servant, referred to as this in his letters, to look after his wants, and then the rest of the family retired to Villeparisis, a small town about eighteen miles from Paris where Balzac withdrew to his study-room, number nine, rue de la Harpe, chosen on account of its nearness to the library de l'Arsenal, apparently the only library unknown to him at that time and where he was very desirous of working. Balzac had to be rather careful about appearing too much in public at Paris, because to save the family honor, he was supposed to be visiting cousins at Aisy.

He worked in the library day after day and spent his nights seated at his table, dressed in a monkish robe, writing the mass of facts, which he had accumulated during the day. For his nourishment he ate bread and sliced lemonade, sometimes drinking great quantities of coffee to keep himself awake. He had so many subjects upon which to write and so many ideas in his head that he wished to express, that he hardly knew where to begin. He wrote and rewrote in feverish excitement, racing against time, and yet he never succeeded in any of his works in attaining the smoothness he wished to give to his writings. Always at his side he had a copy of St. Beuve's *Volupte* which he studied constantly for its smoothness of style. "He is obscure sometimes because he strikes too many matches at once," says Henry James.

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ones--to be famous! to be loved!--will they ever be satisfied!"

He worked hard, read and walked, now in the Père-lachaise instead of the Jardin des Plantes, for he found that "true sorrow is hard to paint:" it needs so much simplicity. Again he said: "Of all emotions, grief is the most difficult to represent."

Meanwhile he had begun his tragedy of "Cromwell" in five acts, fragments of which were published by his sister, Laure, and he was working eagerly, anticipating a triumph for this master-piece.

He was apparently much happier in his work now with

"Rousseau's Julia for my mistress;  
La Fontaine and Molière my friends;  
Racine, my master; and Père-lachaise  
for my walks.  
Ah! if it could only last forever!"

In April 1820, he arrived home with his tragedy completed. Alas! it certainly was a tragedy for him when the assembled family and friends, summoned to the reading of "Cromwell", after listening inattentively and coldly, always with the exception of the adoring Laure, to Balzac's literary efforts, pronounced the verdict of failure. The tragedy was submitted to an impartial judgment, but with no greater success for Balzac was advised to try anything but literature.

However, he was undaunted and, with the remark that tragedies were not in his line, he returned without dismay to his writings. His health was so poor that his mother persuaded him to remain at home, with the understanding that what money he had was to come from his literary work.

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tions, consequently great disturbance to his trains of thought, but, even so, he managed to put out more than ten novels in forty volumes in that time.

His first volumes were published anonymously, signed with such pseudonyms as Horace de Saint-Aubin, de Vieller glé, Lord Rhooone (anagram for Honore) dom Rago and others. "He began to write early and wrote badly," says Henry James. If he wrote badly, he was also poorly paid, but, considering the quality of his early works, it is said to be remarkable that he received anything for his labors. Nor was he in later years unduly proud off his early efforts, even asking his sister not to name or claim them, although he had several reprinted later.

His first attempts were not brilliant nor were they fruitful for him and not until he published *Les Chouans* or *La Bretagne* in 1800, signed with his own name, did his star appear bright in the heavens, although with each literary attempt his talent and powers were progressing. He had to pass through the pupil-training before he could become the master.

Among his early works were *L'Héritière de Birague*, *Jean-Louis* or *La Fille Trouvée*, *Clotilde de Lusignan* or *Le Beau Juif*, of which the best-paid brought him two thousand francs.

Meanwhile he was struggling along with "*La Physiologie du Mariage* "par un jeune célibataire" and "*Les Chouans*", and it so happened that he read his manuscript of the former work to M. Levavas seur, a publisher, who offered to assist him in putting it on the market.

Between 1829 and 1830, he brought out these two books from the printing-press of M. Aubain Canel and became famous overnight. The two men, Levavas seur and Canel, became much



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interested in the young author, whose genius they had been among the first to recognize, and they started him on his path to glory. Balzac, who was always looking for an opportunity to make money, which, according to Werdet, he adored, saw here a grand chance to obtain freedom from the burdensome pressure of his overwhelming debts.

Associating in business with M. Canel, he plunged headlong into the printing of the classics, a venture which met with little success. Then he bought out a printing-press and went deeper in debt. Still undismayed, he changed partners and added a printing-foundry to his press, but he succeeded no better than before and would certainly have made a flat failure of the whole business and ruined his reputation, if his devoted mother had not come to his rescue.

Printing had taken away his money. He resolved it should make good his losses and give him a fortune. Although Balzac had made a great name for himself (he was hailed as a master of literature, the new Molière), he had not yet arrived at the throne which he was to conquer by a will of iron, a vigorous, unconquerable energy, a persistence which would overcome all difficulties, and surmount all obstacles.

He had arrived at a period in his life where he felt bitterness, and a sense of failure because of his repeated disasters seemed to oppress him. "Why," wrote he to his sister, Laure, "wear the clothes of the actor when we never play the role?" "There are no flowers in my life," says Balzac, always restless with his eternal longings-- "my two great desires--to be rich! to be loved!"-- the cry of the strong, impatient soul, fettered and dragged to the ground, doubting yet conscious of ultimate victory.



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In 1827, his family had moved to Versailles and he hired a room in the Rue de Tournan in order to be near his friend and protector, Henri Delatouche, whose acquaintance he had made through M. Canel.

The success of his two novels, "La Physiologie du Mariage" and "Les Chouans" made him quite the lion of the hour and the acquaintances which Balzac made at the time brought him into considerable prominence.

He had long since given up dancing for, at the first ball he attended, Balzac had fallen and his pride and dignity were so hurt by the amusement he caused that he afterwards became a spectator, an observer, always accompanied by the little note-book called his "meat-safe" into which he put extracts from readings, conversations he listened to, in short anything he deemed worthy of note.

The salons of the highest aristocracy were opened to Balzac; that of Baron James de Rothschild where they talked Finance; that of the Countess d'Appony where he listened to discussions on the ancient races. The salon of Mme. Sophie Gay, mother of Mme. de Girardin, gave him associations with Victor Hugo, de Vigny, Lamartine, Rossini, Auber and Meyerbeer. M. Delatouche presented him to George Sand and gradually he came to know all the celebrities of the day.

With his increasing popularity in the social world and its attendant expenses, his debts accumulated and his conscience would not allow him to rest easy. Then too, about this time, he was pursuing his fad of collecting, now instead of fine books, rare paintings (some of which he



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enumerated in "Cousin Pons"), so he wrote unceasingly and seemed to meet with little success, financially speaking from his point of view. Despairing of his success in the literary world, he turned to politics, but, here as elsewhere, met with signal failure.

With all these diverse channels of action claiming his energies, he kept at his writing and had, in addition to all his other troubles, frequent difficulties with his publishers, for he drew on them ahead of time for sums due him upon the completion of manuscripts which he sometimes failed to complete at the appointed time. So he lived on notes and there were always notes to be paid. It seemed that he never would be free for he said--"Il faut que l'artiste mène une vie splendide," and he firmly believed it. True to his belief that "the artist must lead a splendid life," about 1830 he began to put on a great deal of style. He prefixed de to Balzac, pretending to have descended from the ancient family of Entragues. He furnished two houses; possessed a most magnificent carriage with the arms of the Entragues family emblazoned upon the door. Said carriage was driven by a corpulent coachman, attended by a Tom Thumbling groom, both arrayed in livery. He had boxes at "Aux Italiens" and at the Grand Opera.

At the Opera he was wont to pass an hour or two in the evening in the so-called "Loges des Tigres" where assembled the well-known writers of the day, all of whom were by birth more aristocratic than Balzac and far richer in worldly goods. Werdet, who is somewhat biased in his opinion of Balzac, says that the novelist always chose the foremost



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and best place in the box which should have been given by lot to the one who was to occupy it. This self-styled "Grand Maréchal Littéraire", who closely resembled an ox-merchant, stout, dressed as he was in his blue coat with gold buttons, sat complacently in his seat, twirling the bejewelled head of his great band-master cane between his fat hands, affecting a great superiority to the others, who were bored to extinction with his unceasing monologues, his talks on writing, women, Balzac and the famous family of Entragues. No doubt he was tiresome but he is more to be pitied than blamed, for he must have suffered torments from his feverish, incessantly busy brain, if there had been no outlet. No doubt he was cordially disliked for he was inclined to break in upon a conversation uninteresting to him with "Let's talk about something real; Eugénie Grandet for instance," However, few people can listen when they are not especially interested and, of course, they couldn't be expected to feel a vital interest in Eugénie Grandet, nor crippled Mme. Claes nor poor, old, devoted Schmucke.

Balzac had many masters among them several English and American authors, such as Richardson, Goldsmith, Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. Scott impressed him particularly and at first Balzac set out to write a history of the French people, modelled upon the works of Sir Walter Scott, so he began his "Études de Mœurs". It was not until 1842, however, that he called his seventeen volumes of that series, excluding the "Contes Drolatiques", "La Comédie Humaine", a title suggested by one of his friends, Auguste de Belloy, inspired by Dante's "Divina Commedia".



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Once again he changed his abode to the Rue Cassini where he lived with Auguste Borget, a genre-painter, in an attic formerly occupied by Jules Sandeau. There he lived about eight years .

Even while he lived in these attic-rooms, he was putting on more and more style and cultivating an increasing number of expensive fads. Balzac said it was necessary to live magnificently to make a market for his works, but, in truth, it was necessary to the man himself. It wasn't his passion but his passions which made it necessary.

Balzac was working increasingly harder and now he was writing four and five novels at a time. The unceasing hard work, nervous strain of being unable to pay his debts, his failures and disappointments, present and past, his sedentary life, his constant abuse of coffee and narcotics began to undermine his health. He needed a change of scene and air and, since he had heard that there were great riches in the mines of Sardinia and Corsica, he set out from Marseilles for the Islands. There he made friends of brigands whom he met during his travels and came home full of ideas for new novels; ideas which he didn't hesitate to communicate to his literary friends, to the great consternation of his sister, who, fearing that they would profit to her brother's loss, tried to remonstrate with him. "The world is vast", said he, "and the human brain is as vast as the world."

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his indiscretion. However, in his travels, he learned that his reputation as a novelist was already well-established outside of France, a fact that gave Balzac renewed courage.

With great interest, he continued to write volumes of novels and consequently his income grew steadily greater, but he was always in debt and, by his constant borrowing practically ruined some of his friends. His mother lost all she had through him and, when Balzac died, his widow, Mme. Hanska, was obliged to grant her a pension, amounting to three thousand francs.

Werdet, Balzac's publisher from 1830 to 1838, claimed that Balzac ruined him by borrowing constantly on manuscripts which he was slow to complete or failed utterly to produce. Others say that, through Werdet, Balzac lost a vast amount of money. Certain it is that Balzac had earned several fortunes, but his craving for luxury had made him squander them in a most shameful fashion.

Unable to earn money fast enough to satisfy his desires, he returned to his first inspiration, that of producing dramas, but he never was successful in that form of literary production. He planned more novels than he could possibly execute, some of which exist only in title-form always interesting and suggestive, as, for instance, *Soeur Marie des Anges*.

From 1830 on, Balzac had many women friends who influenced his life and works in no small measure. The first of these friends who aided him conspicuously was Mme. de Berny (supposedly Mme. de Mortsauf in "Le Lys dans la Vallée"). She was a married woman with a large family and was considerably



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older than Balzac. It was she who criticized his works and made suggestions which he followed with good grace. She was an inspiring, motherly friend in whom he placed great trust. Balzac was very grateful to her and always spoke of her with affection. Her death, which occurred early in his career, grieved him deeply.

Perhaps his truest, life-long woman friend was Mme. Zulma Carraud, an intimate friend of his sister Laure. Balzac said her friendship was an immense service and an immense rest.

Through M. Delatouche he made the acquaintance of Georges Sand, the publisher's secretary, and they were rather friendly. He recognized in her a woman of great heart and a deep intelligence. Brunetière quotes Balzac in his correspondence with Mme. Hanska, "She (Georges Sand) knows and says herself what I think of it without my telling her; she has neither strength of conception, nor the gift of constructing plots nor the faculty of getting at the truth, nor the art of pathos, but without knowing the French language, she has style and her words ring true." It is needless to say that she was quick to recognize his genius.

His friendship with the Duchess of Abrantès and Mme. Gay gave him the opportunity to study French society under the Directoire and the Empire.

It is said that the one woman for whom Balzac really cared during the early part of his life was the Duchess of Castries, a society-leader who was separated from her husband. She was a Titian-haired beauty, so they said, who was crippled by a fall from her horse. Her salon revealed to Balzac the



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life of the faubourg St-Germain. The Duchess of Castries apparently made a plaything of Balzac, as she went, like a butterfly, here, there and everywhere with him in her train, as she travelled from place to place.

They became very friendly and all was very bright and rosy, when she and her party with Balzac started for Italy. They never arrived there together. Rumor said that there had been a rupture between the members of the party at Geneva; Balzac said the journey was too expensive. At any rate, their friendship grew cold.

Critics say that the merry chase the Duchess led Balzac was the cause of his cynicism. Balzac did not recover quickly from his disappointment and later said that the affair had been one of the greatest sorrows of his life.

Louise, for she is known by no other name, with whom he corresponded for two years, was entirely unknown to him. Balzac never saw her and she dropped completely out of his life when her correspondence with him ceased.

In 1833, Balzac met his long-sought "Pauline" at Neufchatel in the person of Mme. Evelina Hanska, a Polish princess, who was married to a Russian count much older than herself. She was at that time about thirty years of age (La Femme de Trente Ans) and was endowed with the northern love of mysticism in which Balzac was much interested. For the purpose of educating her daughter, Anna, Mme. Hanska travelled the greater part of the time, sometimes accompanied by her husband, but often with her daughter alone.

The Count happened to be with her at Neufchatel and, as it seems, took a great fancy to Balzac, inviting him to



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 herself. She was at that time about thirty years of age  
 (La Femme de Trance was) and was endowed with the northern love  
 of mysticism in which Balzac was much interested. For the  
 purpose of educating her daughter, Anna, Mme. Hanska travelled  
 the greater part of the time, sometimes accompanied by her  
 husband, but often with her daughter alone.  
 The Count happened to be with her at Neuchâtel and,  
 as it seems, took a great fancy to Balzac, inviting him to



visit their Russian home. Because of the expense of the long journey, it was out of the question for Balzac to accept their invitation at that time, but he met Mme. Hanska again at Vienna and elsewhere, and was strongly impressed with her. Three months after making Mme. Hanska's acquaintance, he presented her with his manuscript of "Eugenie Grandet" which was sold by "order of justice" in 1852 after the death of Mme. de Balzac.

For some years, he corresponded frequently and at great length with l'Etrangère, as he called Mme. Hanska, and she promised to marry him upon the death of her husband. The count did not leave her free to carry out her promise until 1843.

Twice Balzac travelled up through Germany into Russia to visit Mme. Hanska in her northern home. Not until 1850, upon his return from his second and last visit in Russia, did he bring her back to France as his bride. Their marriage had been delayed; first, by the Czar who was unwilling to give his consent until Mme. Hanska's property had been made over entirely to her daughter; then, Balzac was always chronically and acutely short of money. His mother was jealous of Mme. Hanska and the family of his sister Laure was suffering financial reverses. However, in May 1850, they were married and returned to Paris.

All Balzac's wishes had been fulfilled. He was happily married, rich, and famous. For him, life was just beginning, but, in a manner that he did not want, for he was dying. A consultation of doctors was held at Paris to pronounce their judgment upon the novelist's condition. Death,



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was their verdict, at best only a few months away. "He is tired," said one of the doctors in "La Peau de Chagrin, "worn-out by too much brainwork; by lack of proper food and exercise; by the repeated employment of stimulants which were too powerful". No verdict could have been more truthfully applied to Balzac.

In his last letter to Theophile Gautier, dictated to Mme. Hanska, Balzac said he could neither read nor write. Medical treatment he had undergone in Russia had caused him to lose his eyesight for a time .

On August 14, 1850 Balzac died at number 14 Rue Fortunée of a severe heart-trouble from which he had suffered for years. With him watched his devoted mother who closed his eyes in death after his "Agonie", for his bride was travelling.

The services for Balzac were held from the church of St-Philippe du Roule, a fashionable house of worship in the faubourg Saint - Honoré. Alexander Dumas and Victor Hugo went together to Père-Lachaise where Hugo spoke beautifully at Balzac's grave.

After Balzac's death, the family lost their fortune. Balzac's papers were sold by "order of justice" and scattered, among them the manuscript of Eugénie Grandet. The house was ransacked before it was handed over to the purchaser, Mme. Salomon de Rothschild, and, as there had been a bonfire, the place was considerably damaged. The Countess Mnizech, daughter of Mme. Hanska, died poor and old at Paris and thus did the material life of the family of Honoré de Balzac come to an end.

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and complicated legacy", for his indestructible, inexhaustible genius, so tied up from him that it was safe, lives on and on and spreads out over ever-widening circles of humanity.

"The life of Balzac explains his work; it makes it known in advance," says Le Breton. Balzac was the searcher for gold, the seeker of the "absolute", into whose life came the fulfillment of all his vast dreams and aspirations; prophet and seer who drained his cup of life to the last drop.

At first, Balzac had no connected plan for linking his novels together. He wanted to call them "Études de Mœurs" descriptive of French society of the nineteenth century, so he began to make special groups of his novels, as, "Scenes from Private Life", which he connected with childhood and adolescence; "Scenes from Provincial Life", periods of combat--passions, ambitions, projects; "Scenes from Parisian Life", which dealt with the vices and exaggerated fancies of the Parisian Society of the nineteenth century. Then, "as the evening of his long day", he grouped the "Scenes from Political, Military and Country Life". He made, in addition to the rest, two groups of "Studies Philosophical and Analytical" and in 1842, his eager search for a fitting title for the "Scenes" ended when Balzac happened upon "La Comédie Humaine". There are at least ninety-seven volumes in this unique collection of novels, which portray the hopes and fears, aspirations and passions, successes and failures of two thousand members of the world-family, from all walks of life, rich and poor, young and old.

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as it appears in some of his finest works; "Le Colonel Chabert" (1832) and "Le Père Goriot" (1835) in the "Scenes from Private Life"; "Eugénie Grandet" (1834) and "Le Curé de Tours" (1832) in the "Scenes from Provincial Life"; "Le Cousin Pons" (1847) and "La Grandeur et Décadence de César Birotteau" (1837) from the "Scenes of Parisian Life"; and, from his "Etudes Philosophiques", "La Peau de Chagrin" (1831), "Jésus-Christ en Flandre" (1831), "El Verdugo" (1829) and "Un drame au bord de la mer" (1834).

Colonel Chabert returns to Paris after some years, to find himself in a most peculiar situation. Before the law, he is dead, and buried, his estate has been divided according to his will, and his wife remarried to the Count Ferraud. He describes to the lawyer Derville (probably Maître Guillonnet-Merville), who, by the way, is his wife's lawyer, how he was buried alive after the battle of Eylau and escaped miraculously from a living death. He says that he was cared for by Germans until his health was sufficiently restored for him to travel as a beggar to Paris.

At first, he undertook to call himself Colonel Chabert, but everyone laughed at him and thought that he was mad, so finally he gave up pretensions to that name. However, once in Paris, he determines to establish himself in his rightful position, for, after being buried under the dead, he escaped only to be buried among the living. His wife knows of his existence, but she has obstinately refused to recognize him or give him any rights.

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some money and promises to help him and the poor, old hero, for such he was when he stemmed the tide of the battle for Napoleon at Eylau, goes away with a ray of hope after leaving the lawyer with all the information he possesses about the names of people and places in Germany where Maître Derville may verify the truth of his statements, which are very quickly substantiated. Then the lawyer proceeds with the case.

He visits the poor, wretched Colonel in his miserable shelter and then the magnificent mansion of his heartless wife, who at first denies the existence of the Colonel. Finally the lawyer brings about a meeting of the husband and wife, when they are to come to an agreement as to their future relations, but the colonel, driven to distraction by his wife's greed and heartlessness, breaks off all chance of amicably settling their difficulties. She departs with injured dignity, glad of a chance to escape, and he bitterly laments his misplaced faith and his lack of judgment, while Derville has lost his case.

But the suave Countess Ferraud is waiting her chance and, when the disappointed old Colonel descends the stairs from the lawyer's office, she is waiting for him and, with soft words, lures him away with her to her country-home at Groslay. For a day or two all goes along serenely enough, but the Countess is wondering what to do with Colonel Chabert. With the aid of her lawyer, Delbecq, she has a paper drawn up for the Colonel to sign in which he is to renounce all pretensions to his claims. Naturally, he refuses to sign, and, as a last resort, the Countess resolves to have him sent to Charenton, the insane-asylum. Luckily, the colonel overhears the plot and makes his escape. Henceforth he is known as Hyacinthe, a miserable



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beggar, once "le comte de l'Empire", who began life in a foundling-home and ends his days in the poor-house.

"How many things have I not learned in exercising my charge!" exclaimed Maître Derville, the lawyer in "Colonel Chabert, a story which they say Balzac heard while a student in a law-office. "I have seen a father die in an attic, without a cent, abandoned by his two daughters to whom he had given forty thousand pounds income!"

"Father Goriot!"

Father Goriot, former vermicellier, lives at the Pension Vauquer, a respectable enough boarding-house, directed by a respectable enough woman of doubtful age and large proportions, Mme. Vauquer, aided by Sylvia, "la grosse cuisinière," and Christopher, the boy of all work. Father Goriot and the six other lodgers are all quite respectable, in short, it is a very respectable establishment.

There are (the) old Mlle. Michonneau with a green shade over her tired eyes and her staunch friend, the mechanic, Monsieur Poirot, "undes ânes de notre grand moulin social;" Mlle. Victorine Taillefer, and her companion and guardian, Mme. Couture; Eugene de Rastignac, a young student; and the strangest, most incomprehensible of men, Vautrin of very doubtful reputation, as it turns out, an ex-convict, alias Trompe-la-mort.

Father Goriot had come to the "Pension Vauquer" in splendid style, with plenty of fine clothes, diamond pins, a large watch-chain and a wonderful snuff-box. There was much fine silver in his cupboard and, by means more or less underhanded, Mme. Vauquer ascertained that he was possessed of considerable income. For her, he became the "perfect man", and it was fitting



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that he should have the best room in the house and everything of the best, because, sooner or later, he must of necessity become the husband of the honorable widow Vauquer, so she planned. But now Father Goriot has fallen from grace. He has moved from the best apartment and some of his possessions are missing. Mme. Vauquer has failed in her purpose and has soured on the subject of marriage with the rich man Goriot, for he pays no attention to her advances.

However, the other boarders and even Mme. Vauquer herself must admit that the respectability of the "Pension Vauquer" is being threatened by this Goriot, for have not at least five different women visited his room of late? To all inquiries, Father Goriot answers: "They are my daughters". "You have thirty-six daughters, have you?" asks Mme. Vauquer bitterly. The truth is that the fat Sylvia who spies upon Father Goriot does not recognize the visitors as the same two women who are always coming to see him.

Father Goriot's jewels and treasures keep on disappearing one by one and he grows old and wrinkled. The household knows for a fact now that he is wasting his money on women and he is subjected to all sorts of abuse.

Now it happens that young de Rastignac has aristocratic relatives among whom is Mme. la vicomtesse de Beauséant, at whose house he makes the acquaintance of the comtesse Anastasie de Restaud. What is <sup>his</sup> surprise when he calls upon Mme. de Restaud to find Father Goriot just leaving her house! Stranger still to de Rastignac is the fact that the mere mention of the name "Father Goriot" in the presence of the Comte de Restaud disturbs that nobleman to the extent that Eugène is invited not to come again.



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Now it happens that young de Restignac has aristocratic relatives among whom is Mrs. de Restignac, at whose house he makes the acquaintance of the comtesse Anastasie de Restignac. What is surprising when he calls upon Mrs. de Restignac to find Father Goriot just leaving her house! Stranger still to de Restignac is the fact that the mere mention of the name "Father Goriot" in the presence of the comtesse de Restignac disturbs that nobleman to the extent that Eugene is invited not to come again.



It seems that "Father Goriot" has two beautiful daughters, Mme. la comtesse Anastasie de Restaud, and Mme. la baronne Delphine de Nucingen of whom he is extremely fond; all they want of him is his money. Years ago, "Father Goriot" had been a prosperous "vermicellier" and by dint of hard work, had accumulated considerable valuable property. His two daughters have been fleecing him out of his money for years, for they must have whatever they want, no matter that it is with his heart's blood that their father is toiling for them.

The daughters are well-married, speaking from a social standpoint, and so long as "Father Goriot" has plenty of money, his sons-in-law are always glad to see him, but now is approaching a time when "Father Goriot" has lost almost everything, even neglects his personal appearance and is reduced to a state of penury.

In this wretched state, he is denied access to the homes of his daughters, although they are still glad to come to him when in need. Eugene de Rastignac understands the situation and, when the daughters forsake their father, he takes up the poor, old man's cause.

"Father Goriot" is very grateful to de Rastignac and furnishes a home for Eugene and Delphine. Just as everything seems bright and the outlook is most pleasant for "Father Goriot" who is to live with Delphine and Eugène, the comtesse de Restaud meets with marital difficulties: Delphine's husband upsets her plans and everything is topsy-turvy. Poor, old "Father Goriot" who has "suffered long and is kind," cannot withstand the shock of the bitter, jealous quarrels and difficulties resultant from the mix-up and dies from an attack of



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Balzac's masterpiece is "Eugénie Grandet", "the poem of silent lives" (Le Breton). Eugénie Grandet lives at Saumur with her parents. Her father is a tyrannical, domineering, miserly monomaniac, whose sole passion is the collecting of riches. Her mother is an unobtrusive, silent figure who watches the life of Saumur from her window and never enters into it except when the Cruchots or the des Grassins come to play loto in the evening.

This particular evening, the twenty-third anniversary of Eugénie's birth, the des Grassins and the Cruchots with Adolphe des Grassins and M. de Bonfons, both aspirants for the rich heiress's hand, are enjoying themselves hugely, each trying to outdo the other, when Charles Grandet from Paris, the nephew of Monsieur Grandet of Saumur, arrives upon the scene.

His father has made a failure of his business and sent the boy to his uncle's at Saumur. Eugénie is unfortunate to fall in love with her cousin, whose father by his suicide makes Charles Grandet a penniless orphan, but the old miser does not look with favor on the match, saying, that he would rather see his daughter cast into the Loire than married to a beggar. So Charles starts for India to retrieve his fallen fortunes, swearing Eugénie eternal love.

Now it so happened that every birthday, Monsieur Grandet used to give Eugénie a gold-piece which she put away



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in her treasure-box. Every year he looked at the gold, counted it, caressed her treasure and put it away, but this year, Eugénie refused to let him see it, for she had given it as a parting-gift to Charles Grandet. Her father is furious, for he suspects at once where it has disappeared and Eugénie is made a prisoner in her father's house.

Mme. Grandet's health, never too good, breaks down under the strain of trying to reconcile her husband and daughter, and finally dies heart-broken at his neglect of her and his cruelty to Eugénie. Then Monsieur Grandet dies and at last, Eugénie is free. Then her thoughts turn to Charles Grandet, from whom she has received no news since his departure. At last, she learns that he has returned and he comes to see her, but to tell her of his approaching marriage with another. The world indeed is black for Eugénie. However, he is perfectly willing that she should pay the debts of his insolvent father.

Eugénie, disillusioned and tired, body and soul, becomes the loveless wife of Monsieur de Bonfons, who soon passes away, leaving a rich, weary-souled widow, much sought-after for her great wealth.

It is Balzac the psychologist who describes with a finish and smoothness unusual in his works the misfortunes of Monsieur François Birotteau, l'abbé de Saint-Gatien de Tours, none other than the brother of César Birotteau. The good Cure de Tours is passionately fond of ease and comfort, the good things of life, and finds his peace of mind much disturbed by his house-keeper, Mademoiselle Sophie Gamard, who, in striving to drive the simple, old soul from his apartment



in her treasure-box. Every year he looked at the gold, counted it, carried her treasure and put it away, but this year, Eugenie refused to let him see it, for she had given it as a parting-gift to Charles Grandet. Her father is furious, for he suspects at once where it has disappeared and Eugenie is made a prisoner in her father's house.

Now, Grandet's health, never too good, breaks down under the strain of trying to reconcile her husband and daughter, and finally dies heart-broken at his neglect of her and his cruelty to Eugenie. Then Monsieur Grandet dies and at last, Eugenie is free. Then her thoughts turn to Charles Grandet, from whom she has received no news since his departure. At last, she learns that he has returned and he comes to see her, but he tells her of his approaching marriage with another. The world indeed is black for Eugenie. However, he is perfectly willing that she should pay the debts of his dissolute father.

Eugenie, disillusioned and tired, body and soul, becomes the loveless wife of Monsieur de Bonfons, who soon passes away, leaving a rich, money-souled widow, much sought-after for her great wealth.

It is Balzac the psychologist who describes with a finish and smoothness unusual in his works the misfortune of Monsieur Grandet's Riteaux, l'abbé de Saint-Gallen de Tours, none other than the brother of César Riteaux. The good Cure de Tours is passionately fond of ease and comfort, the good things of life, and finds his peace of mind much disturbed by his house-keeper, Madame de Riteaux Sophie Gervais, who, in arriving to drive the simple, old soul from his apartment



which she wishes to give to her favorite l'abbé Troubert, sadly interferes with his habits. She keeps him standing out in the rain at night, when she knows he suffers, if his feet get wet. There is no fire in his fire-place when he awakes in the morning; and the maid is very slow in complying with his requests.

Now l'abbé Troubert, Mlle. Gamard's other lodger, covets the apartment which is occupied by Birotteau and, as he understands how to manage the lady, he is bound to succeed in obtaining his desires. The ambition of Troubert with which Birotteau is unable to cope and the passion for attention from which Mademoiselle suffers, unnoticed by the unthinking Cure, finally drive him from his home to that of his most intimate friends, the Listomères, but his two arch-enemies pursue him relentlessly and, as the Listomères cannot afford to combat the Church and the abbé Troubert, he is driven from their home. Poor Birotteau is penniless, friendless and miserable for Mlle. Gamard has retained his property and taken possession of it by virtue of a paper in which he signed away his rights in her favor, if he should leave her house. Abandoned by his friends and broken in spirits, the unhappy Abbé is pushed out of Saint-Gatien and named Cure of Saint-Symphorien in the faubourg of Tours, where he passes into a decline, dragging out his last days in misery.

Balzac found considerable difficulty in naming his novel dealing with the fate of the old, bachelor musician, Pons. He chose successively "Le Vieux Musicien" and "Le Bonhomme Pons" then "Le Parasite", but Mme. Hanska objected to his choice of names and finally he had a happy inspiration to call it



which she wishes to give to her favorite, I'Abbe Troubert.

He is interested with his habits. She keeps him standing

out in the rain at night, when she knows he suffers, if

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Now I'Abbe Troubert, Miss Gervais's other lodger,

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Blotchin is unable to cope and the passion for attention from

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Balzac found considerable difficulty in naming his

novel dealing with the fate of the old, bachelor master, Tons.

He chose successively "Le Vieux Maître" and "Le Bonhomme

Tons" then "Le Parastat", but Mrs. Hanaka objected to his choice

of names and finally he had a happy inspiration to call it



"Le Cousin Pons" to relate it to "La Cousine Bette".

Cousin Pons has seen the time when he enjoyed quite a reputation in the musical world, but now he is old and careless, somewhat miserly in his habits; in short, he is passe. However, he always has enjoyed good dinners and material comforts and his tastes in such matters do not diminish with his declining years. He still persists in dining with his friends and relatives, especially the Camusots, new-rich social-climbers, selfish and thoughtless, disregarding everybody and everything but their own social ambitions.

When his sensitive pride is too deeply wounded by their thoughtless cruelty to him, Pons turns for consolation to his one devoted friend and confidant, the German musician, Schmucke, who plays in the orchestra with Pons, and who is almost old-womanish in his affection for Pons. These two old "casse-noisettes" as the urchins of the quarter call them, are cared for tenderly, if one may call Balzac's "Sairy Gamp" tender, like two infants by Mme. Cibot, the belle of the neighborhood.

Now it happens that Pons falls ill of worry and sensitiveness, and, in that helpless state, is tended carefully by Schmucke and fretted constantly by Mme. Cibot, the dear woman, who is very anxious to get some of Pons' money. She has him at her mercy, too, for has she not already ascertained the value of the sick man's collection of paintings? Elie Magus, the collector and connoisseur, has even managed to spirit away several paintings for which he has realized a considerable sum.

So she watches her chance and, when she is sure that



"La Cousine Pons" to relate it to "La Cousine Mathilde".

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Pons has left all his property to Schmucke, good Mme. Cibot burns up the will, ("I have seen wills burned up", cries the lawyer in Colonel Chabert.) but, the old musician has suspected just such a trick and there is a will remaining which leaves all to Schmucke.

And so Pons dies in peace, but not before Rémonencq, Mme. Cibot's lover has "speeded the departing guest" in the shape of M. Cibot with poison and later, she herself would have met with the same fate, if her kind Rémonencq had not drunk by mistake the poison he left for her.

The Cibots, and Rémonencq and Camusots prove too strong for the simple, childish Schmucke who is deprived of his succession and he too passes away broken-hearted. Balzac certainly has a remarkable genius for making old age and homeliness pathetically interesting.

The question of money is the center around which Balzac weaves so many of his plots and "César Birotteau", which, by the way, was written in fifteen days, is no exception to the rule. It is the old story of the frog who tries to surpass his own dimensions and, in so doing, becomes still smaller than before.

César Birotteau, the hero of the novel, feels impelled to enlarge his business, make his house grander and put on a magnificent appearance, for is he not "chevalier de la Légion d'honneur"? To celebrate the honor conferred upon himself and his family, he gives a grand ball in his renovated mansion;

All his undertakings are sure to turn out splendidly, for the beginning is very auspicious. However, Mme. Constance Birotteau and her daughter, Césarine, the family of César, feel very



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The question of money is the center around which Balzac weaves so many of his plots and "Germinal Bistrot", which, by the way, was written in fifteen days, is no exception to the rule. It is the old story of the frog who tries to surpass his own dimensions and, in so doing, becomes still smaller than before.

Germinal Bistrot, the hero of the novel, feels impelled to enlarge his business, make his house grander and put on a magnificent appearance, for is he not "chevalier de la Legion d'honneur"? To celebrate the honor conferred upon himself and his family, he gives a grand ball in his renovated mansion; All his undertakings are sure to turn out splendidly, for the beginning is very auspicious. However, Mme. Germaine Bistrot and her daughter, Germaine, the family of Cesar, feel very



uneasy, for their pecuniary circumstances do not warrant any such outlay and splendor.

But César is lucky and clever in money-matters, so he thinks, for the master-perfumer, Birotteau has already launched upon the market a successful cosmetic paste and toilet water and now he is staking his all upon a certain preparation of hazel-nut oil for the hair and scalp. The idea does not occur to him that he can meet with failure, but, through lack of foresight and carelessness, his reserve money is gone before he realizes the fact.

The rascally lawyer, Roguin, makes off with a considerable sum; all his architects, decorators and masons press him for their due and the oil-business has as yet failed to succeed.

The honest perfumer becomes bankrupt, to his mind a terrible misfortune, and the family has to suffer. Mme. Birotteau and Césarine immediately get to work and César starts in to recover his lost fortune. By dint of great care and prudence, the three loyal members of the honest family accumulate enough savings to pay their debts. César Birotteau can once more look the world in the face, wearing his beribboned cross which he laid aside to bear a heavier cross within.

However great and interesting Balzac may be in his studies of humanity and the manners and customs of the seething mass of beings of which it is composed, he is just as interesting and his genius is as glowing in the role of a philosopher and thinker. He loved mystery, magic and occult sciences and he set himself to thinking deeply about the causes and effects and the primal motives and elements of things. He was far ahead of



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the science of his time and foresaw a great future for electricity in human relations and, in "La Recherche de l'Absolu", thought that the azote might be decomposed into its primal elements, which was later proved to be a scientific fact.

In "La Recherche de l'Absolu", Balthasar Claes is a frantic monomaniac beset by a persistent desire to dissolve the azote, to know its unknown elements, to explain that "something" inexplicable, to stand face to face with God. The ardent scientist is so engrossed with his absorbing work, that he forgets his family and all his worldly obligations. Then he, once so spick and span about his personal appearance, becomes careless to such a noticeable degree that the family is annoyed and worried, especially since at first, no one of his intimates knows the reason for his increasing abstraction of mind and frequent absences from the house.

At least the truth is known. It is the fever of pursuing the "absolute" that is burning up Balthasar Claes' life. He is always so pathetically near to accomplishing his desire,--and yet so far. Interruptions will come, a knock at the door or the breaking of his chemical apparatus and the work must begin anew. Undismayed the chemist returns to his experiment, never succeeding in finding the elements of the "absolute".

Into the fiery furnace, he throws all his energies and quickly his life's flame is burning out. Not only is his life his sacrifice, but the family suffers. He signs away his property and piece by piece family jewels and silverware, treasures and heirlooms, disappear to appease his unquenchable fire. It would truly seem that as Balzac himself said,



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"A head has taken fire and not all the firement in Douai can put it out."

Not until death's hand cools his brow, does he find the "Absolute" and then it is too late to try and leave the solution of the riddle to his beautiful daughter, Marguerite, who by her sweet temper and self-sacrifice, had saved the family from disaster and given her unfortunate father every chance possible to find the "Absolute".

One needs only to read "La Peau de Chagrin" to know Balzac's life. He seems to have known it in advance. Balzac was Raphael Valentin,--de Valentin, if you please, with his hard struggles, and failures; the vigorous, young man whose life is fleeing before him and who cannot reach the desired goal. It is Balzac's "Recherche de l'Absolu" where the "Absolute" is Pauline, always tantalizingly within his grasp, yet elusive "comme un mot vainement cherche qui court dans la memoire sans se laisser saisir", "the queen of illusions".

Some of Balzac's theories are extremely interesting. According to the "Peau de Chagrin" there are two great forces at work in the universe: Religion and Monarchy, which are in all and govern all.

Every line of the work is full of meaning: "Thought is the key to all the treasures." "Perhaps Moses, Sulla, Louis XI, Richelieu, Robespierre and Napoleon are the same man appearing in different ages of the world"; and again, "When man thinks his work is perfected, he has only rearranged things". Balzac, speaking through Blanchon, a medical student says, "Do you know that one too many or one too few parts of phosphorus makes the genius or the rascal, the intelligent man or the idiot, the virtuous man or the crim-



"A head has taken time and not all the time in the world can

put it out."

For until each's hand could also grow, does he

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Yet elusive "comes in not vain" and the court hand is

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inal?"

Perhaps the most beautiful of his "Études Philosophiques", is "Jésus-Christ en Flandre". The ferry-boat, plying between the Island of Cadzant and Ostend, crowded full of impatient travellers, is about to leave the shore when a passenger comes at the last call. Seeing no room in the stern of the boat where are seated the nobility, he takes his place among the humble in the bow, who make way for him courteously and kindly.

But the sky is growing dark rapidly and storm-clouds gather: some of the passengers are fearful of arriving safely at Ostend. As the storm draws near, the consternation of the voyagers increase until they become panic-stricken in the blackness.

Suddenly the clouds open and frightened faces gaze anxiously at the stranger who sits among them peaceful and unafraid, his hair, golden as a halo, parted on his fore-head. "Well, he is lucky not to see the danger we are in. He sits there like a dog and will die without agony," says the doctor, but scarcely are the words out of his mouth before the storm breaks in all its fury. The boat whirls around and the sea-water comes in. The passengers are in an uproar, but to their cries for help comes a voice apparently from the depths of the sea that cheers the faithful and gives them confidence. It is the stranger who speaks and they all watch him and trust implicitly in his word; so wonderful a light shines on his face, they cannot help but follow him. So, when the ship goes to pieces, at his command, the faithful arise and follow him; a woman with her babe, a soldier, a repentant sinner and two peasants do his bidding,



Perhaps the most beautiful of his "Etudes Philosophiques", is "Jésus-Christ en Palestine". The ferry-boat, plying between the island of Oland and Oland, crowded full of impatient travellers, is about to leave the shore when a passenger comes at the last call, seeing no room in the stern of the boat where are seated the nobility, he takes his place among the humble in the bow, who make way for him courteously and kindly. But the sky is growing dark rapidly and storm-clouds gather: some of the passengers are fearful of arriving safely at Oland. As the storm draws near, the consternation of the voyagers increases until they become panic-stricken in the darkness. Suddenly the clouds open and frightened faces gaze anxiously at the stranger who sits among them peaceful and unalarmed, his hair, golden as a halo, parted on his forehead. "Well, he is lucky not to see the danger we are in. He sits there like a dog and will die without agony," says the doctor, but scarcely are the words out of his mouth before the storm breaks in all its fury. The boat whirled around and the sea-water comes in. The passengers are in an uproar, but to their cries for help comes a voice apparently from the depths of the sea that cheers the faithful and gives them confidence. It is the stranger who speaks and they all watch him and trust implicitly in his word; so wonderful a light shines on his face, they cannot help but follow him. So, when the ship goes to pieces, at his command the faithful arise and follow him: a woman with her babe, a soldier, a repentant sinner and two peasants do his bidding.



but "Doubting Thomas" following in the van, loses his faith and falls into the sea. After three attempts, he walks upon the sea.

Now the miser wants to do likewise, but he cannot leave his gold, and his treasure costs him his life; so too, a savant, laughing scornfully at the mere suggestion of walking on the water is swallowed up by the ocean, along with a bishop and a noblewoman, who are heavy with crimes, with too great lack of faith and overmuch confidence in false gods, but light of alms and true religion.

Then, after the storm, "l'Homme" comes down from the rock where he is seated and brings the pilot of the little ship, safe to Ostend and the stranger with the luminous face is seen no more in Flanders.

The living present grows from the dead past, but the manner in which it grows and builds upon the days of long ago, is sometimes unpleasant, if not grewsome. The Spanish family of Léganes is accused of treason to the French government, so that all its members are condemned to death.

Juanito, the eldest son, is spared at the request of his father on condition that the poor fellow kill with his own hand the other members of his family. He cannot do otherwise than obey the commands of the old marquis, his father, but he lives on with his torturing conscience, awaiting the peace of death.

Omar Khayyam says,

"I sometimes think that never blooms the  
rose so red,  
As where some buried Caesar bled.  
That every flower that the garden blows,  
Dropped in its lap from some once lovely  
head."



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Equally horrid and distressing is Balzac's "Un drame au bord de la mer", a story which savours of Ancient Rome when fathers had the power of life and death over their sons.

Pierre Cambremer, driven to desperation by the lawlessness of his son, Jacques, is beside himself when the boy returns home from the town and steals from his own mother. Jacques refuses to confess his guilt either to his father or to the priest, although confronted with the evidence, and he adds insult to injury. Thereupon, seeing that prayers and threats are of no avail, his father sends him to bed.

In the night when the son is sleeping soundly, Pierre Cambremer gets out of bed, wraps up his son, gags his mouth and binds his limbs, and, then dragging the wretched lad into his little boat, the father puts out to sea.

Then the mother, who is watching in the night, hears a dull splash, as the father casts his son into the sea. The unhappy mother dies within a week and Pierre Cambremer, "l'homme au voeu", ends his days in prayer and penitence upon a rocky cliff. "Truth is stranger than fiction", said Balzac.

Balzac attributed to himself all that Georges Sand, in his estimation, did not have and he was right in so doing. No one will deny that he had a remarkable power of conception; a splendid gift in constructing plots, although of course, his characters seem to force themselves upon him and the situations in which they find themselves



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apparently rise in his mind without effort or plan on his part; he reached the truth, and had the art of pathos, especially in cases dealing with old age and ugliness; he knew the French language; and he too had a certain style all his own, not smooth like that of St. Beuve and Georges Sand, but vigorous, robust and energetic.

The modern realistic novel of which Balzac is the creator, the "master of us all as we stand" says Henry James, grew out of the personal novel, which dealt with the passions, aspirations and experiences of the author, and the historical novel, which wove its themes about the men and women of history. Both these classes of novels partook of an aristocratic rather than democratic nature. The homely, rather ugly details of every-day life were suppressed as unnecessary and useless.

Balzac considered that "nothing useless is or low" and set up as his ideal work the representation of life in its complete form. His works then of necessity made their influence felt in three broad fields of literary endeavor; the theater, the novel and history.

Until his time the personages of the theater had been somewhat artificial; lords and ladies of high degree, colorless, dull in the extreme and negative as far as their influence reached in enlarging and broadening human life. Balzac brought a certain, originality in his works, full of vigorous, interesting, positive people into the field of literature, which certainly influenced Emile Augier and Alexandre Dumas fils. Monsieur Taine likened Balzac to Shakespeare for his characters are "grand in good fortune



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The modern realistic novel of which Balzac is the creator, the "master of us all as we stand" says Henry James, grew out of the personal novel, which dealt with the passions, aspirations and experiences of the author, and the historical novel, which wove its themes about the men and women of history. Both these classes of novels partook of an artistic rather than democratic nature. The homely, rather ugly details of every-day life were suppressed as unnecessary and useless.

Balzac considered that "nothing useless is or low" and set up as his ideal work the representation of life in its complete form. His works then of necessity made their influence felt in three broad fields of literary endeavor; the theater, the novel and history.

Until his time the personages of the theater had been somewhat artificial; lords and ladies of high degree, colorless, dull in the extreme and negative as far as their influence reached in enlarging and broadening human life. Balzac brought a certain originality to his works, full of vigorous, interesting, positive people into the field of literature, which certainly influenced Emile Augier and Alexandre Dumas fils. Monsieur Taine likened Balzac to Shakespeare for his characters are "grand in good fortune



and misfortune". Wedmore places him in the class of Goethe, Wordsworth and Browning as a painter of ordinary types of humanity.

Balzac lacked the lyrical element in his novels, but Balzac's style closely resembles that of Scott, Dickens and Thackeray, whose works all lacked the lyrical element and who were all masters in the art of representing life in beauty and ugliness, life as it is for the rich and poor, young and old. Lanson says of Balzac: "He is the father of modern realism, belonging to the Romantic School; a writer without artistic sense, poetical genius nor style; but he represents to perfection the common crowd, the rabble, and the middle class; their modes of living; their manners; things material and tangible."

The love-theme of the earlier plays and novels was not given the principal place in Balzac's works. The question of making and keeping money, finance demands much attention in his novels and thus brings the reader's thought to a vital question, important for all his world-family, whose members are "Eugénie Grandet" or "César Birotteau" but are unidentified and might be you or I or any human being.

Although Balzac at first was somewhat indebted to Victor Hugo, later the author of "Les Misérables" owed much to Balzac. The style of "Les Misérables" is very similar to that of "La Comédie Humaine" and there are strong points of resemblance between certain characters, as, for instance, between "Father Goriot" and Jean Valjean and between Marguerite Claes and Cosette.

Among other prominent exponents of Balzac's art are



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Labiche and Halévy, Henri Becque and Zola, but Daudet and Guy de Maupassant are two of his best pupils. These pupils and followers of Balzac must of necessity differ from their master, for the personal equation is bound to enter into their works, but, in the final analysis, in the essence of their works, they are essentially Balzac's disciples, for he blazed for them the trail.

Of course his works gave birth to a lower order of literary school, so-called naturalist, which was no great credit to its founders and of doubtful literary value. Then too, there arose a satirist school, but it was of no literary importance.

Balzac's novels had considerable influence upon history. History before his time had been treated as a mass of accumulated facts,--dates, and events, dull and uninteresting. By the power of his vivid imagination and with his observant curiosity, he dressed up the dry facts and revealed the customs and people in a new light.

His novels are an encyclopedia in themselves, where history, geography, medicine and sciences of all sorts and kinds are fully described and treated. Henry James wonders where he quarries all his material and where he stores it, once quarried. Balzac seemed to know intuitively without effort on his part, without quarrying as it were.

He says of Balzac: "Many of us may stray, but he always remains by virtue of his weight. Heavy, if you like, but heavy because weighted with his great fortune, the extraordinary fortune that has surrounded all the extravagance of his career, his twenty years of royal intellectual spending,



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and that has done so by reason of the rare value of  
the original property - the high, prime genius, so  
tied-up from him that it was safe."

Le Yare Carlot      Paris      Calmann - Levy

Souvenirs de la Vie Provinciale

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Régénération Grandet      Paris      Calmann - Levy

Le Sarc de Tours      Paris      Nelson

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El drame au bord de la mer

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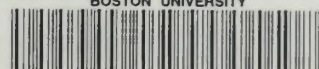
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